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Teoria politica

# Crowds and Power and the Myth of Transformations. Why and for What Reason We Abandon Universal History\*

Penka Angelova\*\*

## Abstract

*The interpretations of Crowds and Power can be seen as falling into four groups: applied or immanently poetic interpretations; socially applied political reception; productive and aesthetic (genetic) and structural and functional analyses. An important role in Canetti's work is played by his transformation myth. The connection between transformation, figure and mask is important for both Canetti's ontological and theatrical theory. Canetti distances himself from historicism and historicity. His unique thinking process aims at a complete encompassing of the problems in the interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary approach. In Crowds and Power Canetti abandons the comprehensive historicity of universal history in order to find the forces which govern history and to seek answers to universal human questions. Canetti expects and insists upon transformation to be used as a cognitive modus of the historical and political processes. Yet, we must not forget that, according to him, only a part of knowledge can be attained through the mask of transformation. The remaining, equally important part of the knowledge is being attained «outside» and «on the side», and independent of either side in the comparative observation of Unmasking. Canetti views nationalisms and religions as a problem of crowd psychology. He stands at the beginning of the cultural reversal which through the dimension of auto-reflexivity and the new definition of the ratio between subject and object in knowledge constructs the connection between analysis of society and of culture. In opposition to all crowd theories, positioning the crowd in opposition to the individual, Canetti sees the understanding of the crowd WITHIN the individual as of primary importance, that is to say, the understanding of his instinct for the crowd. Around this proximity between the concept of crowds in the natural sciences and in the humanitarian understanding of the concept of the crowd and the attendant concept of power, the whole of Canetti's anthropological, cognitive and aesthetic theory of transformation (Verwandlung) and the opposite process of unmasking (Entwandlung) has been constructed.*

**Keywords:** Crowds. Power. Metamorphoses. Mnemonic Techniques. Canetti's Myth of Transformation. Deconstruction of the Concept of Nation.

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Elias Canetti's theoretical work *Crowds and Power*<sup>1</sup> has been referenced by many authors, yet it is the least analyzed of the author's works. This is due primarily to the fact that because of the theory's attractiveness, the form of the narrative has been overlooked, although, like *The Glass Bead Game*, *Kakania* or *The Men without Qualities*, this title has made deep inroads in the political and journalistic world without adequate knowledge of the whole text. Such are the dangers of excessive popularity of some images which tend to leave the sphere of their own imaginary and enter areas which are alien to their intrinsic value. In a word, it is imperative that we not only talk about *Crowds and Power*, but examine it in its entirety and internal dynamics. In addition, the public interest seems to be directed at mass media, without really knowing mass media. Yet, it is Canetti who offers such knowledge which is urgently needed in an age dominated by mass performances.

The only attempt at a unified analysis of *Crowds and Power* is Petra Kahnau's *Crowds and Power in History: towards a Concept of the Anthropological Constants in Elias Canetti's Works* (1996). The interpretations of *Crowds and Power* can be seen as falling into four groups:

- applied or immanently poetic interpretations which use the conclusions and the tools of *Crowds and Power* to interpret the rest of Canetti's works;
- socially applied (aesthetic reception or political reception, as well as socio-historically oriented);
- productive and aesthetic (genetic);
- and structural and functional analyses.

This classification is the only one where the boundaries are not strictly delineated, and the analyses and interpretations do not adhere strictly to this fictitious division. Such overlapping is characteristic of the immanently applied and of the structural and functional analyses where the experience and the conclusions of *Crowds and Power* are applied to other works. Similarly, the structural and functional approach uses Canetti's accompanying essays or notes, as is the case with Dagmar Barnouw, who discusses *Crowds and Power* alongside *Auto-da-Fe*<sup>2</sup>.

The immanently poetic approach has already been introduced by Canetti's first scholar, Dieter Dissinger in his dissertation «Separation and Mass Psychology: Elias Canetti's novel *Auto-da-Fe*», where he uses Canetti's theory as an interpretational medium for his analysis of the novel. In this way he offers an interesting and productive reading of *Auto-da-Fe* without fully grasping the implications of *Crowds and Power*, but using only a part of them as a basis for his interpretation. In a similar way, David Roberts<sup>3</sup> sees *Auto-da-Fe* as a fictional forerunner of *Crowds and Power* and executes a textually immanent sequence based on the hermeneutic tools of Canetti's theoretical work. This type of approach can be found in other scholars as well who evoke diverse passages and conclusions from

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<sup>1</sup> Canetti, 1984. Subsequent citations and references are to this edition. Hereinafter abbreviated as CaP. The underlining of passages is by Canetti.

<sup>2</sup> Barnouw, 1979. Respectively, the chapter in the third part of the study is called *Crowds and Power/Auto-da-Fe: Transformation and knowledge*, 44-79.

<sup>3</sup> Roberts, 1975.

*Crowds and Power* to specific works, using them, so to say, as an «archeology» of their images and ideas. This interpretational approach runs the risk of ignoring other literary and poetic connections due to an inordinate fixation on *Crowds and Power*, thus turning Canetti's works into illustrations of his distinct theoretical insights. Yet another similar approach is Youssef Ishaghpour's: *Crowds and Power* in Elias Canetti's Works<sup>4</sup>. Commenting on biographically oriented approaches Christoph Menke notes:

In the light of Canetti's later autobiographical books, surprisingly, *Crowds and Power* is transformed into an autobiographical document about its author's experience.

Then, quoting Canetti, he warns:

The autobiographical dissection and disintegration of his texts into disconnected experiences belong to the kind of phenomenon which Canetti himself denounces as a «psychoanalytical infection» (AS 138)<sup>5</sup>.

The symposia organized yearly by John Patillo-Hess and the *Crowds and Power* Society, which serve as a venue for exchange of ideas about different chapters of *Crowds and Power*, are a good example of socially applied analyses. They are attended by well-known scholars, writers, publicists, and theologians: the subject matter attracts the wider public thus entering into the interdisciplinary field. These symposia enhance greatly the popularity of Canetti's works and achieve what is expected from a philosophy: its «verification» by and application to social experience. Even so, some of the symposia papers have a superficial and speculative character, a danger detected in all wide ranging social forums. Some authors take an idea out of its context in the work, and its veracity is being applied and tested in social reality. This reception- aesthetics and reception-political analytical tendency is quite typical of many studies. Karl Marcus Gaus offers such an example in *The Myth of Kosovo Polje*<sup>6</sup>, representing *Crowds and Power* as a poignantly timely reading, helping us «interpret» the events of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in Serbia and the wars she engaged in. This «special case» in Gaus' interpretation is transformed into an «European model» of xenophobia and is upheld by the «crowds of the dead». Other readings that fall into this category are: Durs Grubain's, *We, the Bushmen: Memories of an Interpretation*<sup>7</sup>, where value categories are applied to the bushmen who are outside of Canetti's scope; Jeremy Adler's<sup>8</sup> article, «The Happy Crowd: the Role of Theatre during the Velvet Revolution in Czechoslovakia», as well as in Kark Markus Michel's presentation, *The Silence of Power*<sup>9</sup>. A most interesting and productive example is Syed Ibrahim's dissertation «Portrayal of the Crowds in the Works of Elias Canetti»<sup>10</sup>, who applies Canetti's theory to interpret the historical events in India

<sup>4</sup> Ishaghpour, 1990.

<sup>5</sup> Menke, 1995: 38.

<sup>6</sup> Gauß, 1995a and 1995b.

<sup>7</sup> Grünbein, 1995.

<sup>8</sup> Adler, 1995.

<sup>9</sup> Michel, 1995.

<sup>10</sup> Ibrahim, 2016.

after WWII and after India's independence. In recent years Canetti's perception of the role and the significance of the «invisible crowds» attracts a lot of attention prompted by the appearance of a new type of cybernetic masses and trolls, receiving massive numbers of likes and hates which could change reality.

A special form of applied reception is the complementary reception which aims at expanding Canetti's theoretical observations by adding new historical experience. We are not talking about application by filling up the «empty spaces» with examples, but about the introduction of new concepts, as is the case with Karl Marcus Mickel's<sup>11</sup> term «disintegration of power». Another example of a complementary interpretation is Rita Bischoff's «The Theatre of Power: the Connection between Destiny and Politics»<sup>12</sup>. Using Canetti's analogy between the theory of theatre and power, Bischoff traces the transformations of the theatre metaphor in state theories and political experience.

The third line of interpretation is the productive and aesthetic, or genetic analysis which throws light on the two aspects in the historical perception of Canetti's theoretical output. On the one hand, by examining intertextuality in a philosophical and historical perspective, the genesis of Canetti's ideas and their connection with thinkers from antiquity can be traced (Benedikt)<sup>13</sup>, or connections and affinities with contemporary thinkers, such as Hannah Arendt, Michel Foucault (Urs Marti)<sup>14</sup> and Batalle (Rita Bischoff)<sup>15</sup> can be established. On the other hand, the author's works can be examined on a biographical and historical level. Canetti himself significantly contributes to such endeavors with his autobiographies which can be looked upon not only as «archeology of Auto-da-Fe» as Gerald Steig has noted, but also as an archeology of *Crowds and Power*. This biographical approach can be very productive when compared with the biographical experience of others, thus making a contribution to historiography in the way in which Gerald Steig does with his book, *The Fruit of Fire*, about the 1927 fire in front of the Court of Justice in Vienna<sup>16</sup>.

The structural and functional analysis which examines the work in its entirety with its structures and their functions is the one that has been the least utilized in respect to Canetti's works. While there are numerous studies of his novel and plays, there is only one study of *Crowds and Power*, and in other studies *Crowds and Power* is examined partially, or in the context of Canetti's whole output. For example, Hansjacob Werlen strives to hear «the voice of the individual» in the telos of *Crowds and Power* and comes to the conclusion that «the individual has disappeared» and the concept of an alternative social order cannot be found<sup>17</sup>. Dagmar Barnouw, on the other hand, applies the concept of «poetic anthropology», taking into consideration the specifics of representation and the need for a classification system which can accommodate Canetti's theory, thus placing the

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<sup>11</sup> Michel, 1992.

<sup>12</sup> Bischoff, 1992.

<sup>13</sup> Benedikt, 1997.

<sup>14</sup> Marti, 1991.

<sup>15</sup> Bischoff, 1990.

<sup>16</sup> Stieg, 1990.

<sup>17</sup> Werlen, 1995: 159 and 161.

work in the in-between area of poetry and science. Similarly, in the book *Elias Canetti: an Introduction*<sup>18</sup> the author reviews the themes and motives in Canetti's works, without attempting an interpretation.

Perta Kuhnau introduces a new perspective<sup>19</sup> by establishing a connection between Canetti's concepts formulated under the influence of physics and chemistry, and the relationship between the crowds and power: the connection between physics and psychology. In the context of the theory of relativity and the quantitative theory and their significance for the scientific and cognitive process and the methodology of natural sciences, Kuhnau claims that Canetti uses concepts from the field of physics: mass and gravitation, discharge and electricity, open and closed masses, mass crystals and aggregate condition of matter, mass and entropy, systems and double masses, increase pack etc. Regrettably, she does not use the full potential of this method to discover Canetti's deconstructivist approaches but discovers what seems to be shortcomings in view of historical, philosophical and ethical topics<sup>20</sup>.

It would have been more interesting to trace the nature of this enhancement and enlargement of the anthropomorphic studies using the approach of the natural sciences. Thus, Canetti's examination of the human mass (societal and civilizational formations) as a part of the much larger mass of the Universe, which functions according to the same laws, cannot be looked upon as a shortcoming. The traditional division of man into a physical (hence natural) and a thinking and reasonable being, creating artefacts, and the attendant classification of the sciences about man, can be perceived in this way while looking for a more complex approach in the study of man. In this sense, Canetti's approach in *Crowds and Power* can be seen as a deconstruction of the traditional humanitarian concepts about crowds and power and as an attempt for the latter to be reconstructed in view of their relationship with nature.

During a wintry night in 1924, while walking along Alserstrasse and gazing at the Vienna sky, the chemistry student Canetti must have discovered the analogy between the physical and the human mass, between power and force, and dedicated his life long creative effort to the study of this connection in an attempt to find a new insight into history and a new kind of ethics. The author's works are seen by his interpreters as a «poetic anthropology» (D. Barnouw), or as being positioned between the «drawers of different sciences» and connecting in «an original way the disparate achievements of sociology, ethology, biology, ethnology, psychiatry, psychology and philosophy» and claiming to have «a universal character that eliminates the division and separation of scientific fields»<sup>21</sup>. As Endre Kiss points out, Canetti in *Crowds and Power* takes on the «newly created mass psychological concepts of the 20ies as an opportunity not only to re-think, but also to re-construct human history»<sup>22</sup>.

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<sup>18</sup> Barnouw, 1996.

<sup>19</sup> Kuhnau, 1996.

<sup>20</sup> See Kuhnau, 1996: 96, Footnote 28.

<sup>21</sup> Zepp, 1990: 3f.

<sup>22</sup> Kiss, 1997.

## 1. Initiation and its connection with the micro and macro structure of the work: gnoseologic structure

As a starting point, a kind of illumination and insight into the nature of the crowd and power instinct, Elias Canetti describes a midnight walk along Alserstrasse in the winter of 1924/25, thus providing not only bibliographical identification of the time and the place of the «insight», but a detailed description of the scene of the «illumination», which is a kind of profane «revelation» during his observation of the night sky which takes him to an intense auto reflective exegesis of his examination of the phenomena of crowds and power as they relate to the narrative structure of the creative work:

The Illumination, which I recall so clearly, took place on Alserstrasse. It was night; in the sky, I noticed the red reflection of the city, and I craned my neck to look up at it. I paid my attention to where I was walking. I tripped several times, and in such an instant of stumbling, while craning my neck, gazing at the red sky, which I didn't really like, it suddenly flashed through my mind: I realized that there is such a thing as a crowd instinct, which is always in conflict with the personality instinct, and that the struggle between the two of them can explain the course of human history. This couldn't have been a new idea; but it was new to me, for it struck me with tremendous force. Everything now happening in the world could, it seemed to me, be traced back to that struggle<sup>23</sup>.

This experience can be viewed as a key scene in the cognitive and narrative structuring of the work, as well as, of Canetti's knowledge theory.

This illumination determines the perspective Canetti adopts during his work: the two instincts, the crowd instinct and the power instinct are the subjects of examination in both parts of the work, and the field between their voltage poles is filled with examples from the whole history of mankind. One needs only to imagine the solitude of that winter night and the triple constellation between the lonely, stumbling young man, the endless sky, which is perceived as the mass of the universe, the greatest mass a human being can think of, and the «red reflection» of the metropolis, of the crowd space of people, in order to understand the enormous power of this illumination, which is at the same time a form of initiation, so as to be able to discover and identify them later in the constellations of the work. The experience of this trinity can be defined as an initiation rite of the nineteen-year old youth, a kind of dedication to the secret of crowds and power. Canetti's initiation leaves the boundaries of the Kantian two-polar, or Popper's three-polar constellation. We are not talking about a confrontation with the world, and respectively, with the Three worlds, but about them being identical. The Kantian problem of knowing the moral law is confronted with the knowledge of the whole human being in its trinity with the universal and with a human community operating under the crowd instinct. Canetti argues in favor of a deferral of the Cartesian juxtaposition between consciousness and sense, the human and the animal<sup>24</sup>, and

<sup>23</sup> Canetti, 1983: 123.

<sup>24</sup> See also Marti, 1997. Referring to Thomas Hobbs's *De Cive; Or, the Citizen*, Marti concludes that the political philosophy of the New Age begins with the assertion that a man to a man is wolf which leads to the fact that «the birth of the modern political philosophy has not fared well with its critics: it

in favor of the recognition of their intrinsic wholeness and unity. From a scientific point of view, this means a recognition of the compatibility between physiology and psychology. The triple constellation of this key experience is also valid for the structure of representation and narration in *Crowds and Power*. To begin with, it can be discovered in the macro structure of the two parts about crowds and power: structurally the book is divided into two almost equal parts, which are defined by their titles —the part about the crowds and the part about the power—. The crowds part opens with the individual's «fear of touch»<sup>25</sup>, only to be reversed into a craving to become one with the crowds, and goes on to examine the different manifestations of the crowds and the pack in human history and in different religions, and ends with the act of self-annihilation of the Xosas tribe in South Africa in the name of its crowds of the dead —the swallowing up of the living by the dead—. Between the «naked individuality» and the crowds of the dead, between these two extremes, the whole spectrum of different crowds is laid out.

The narrative perspective follows different travails of the «we-perspective» as a narrative perspective of the universal human experience, thus tracing the crowds' «reflection» in the universum. In this way, the narrative begins with the individual human being, passes through other individual experiences as it expands them by introducing quotations and references from history and mythology without historicizing them; the narrative represents the experiences of humankind through separate, carefully selected texts, then places them in the experience of the present of the author and the recipient, at the same time at which it illustrates the crowds and power paradigm through individual examples. The experience of the trinity of the three initiation words implies also the way of knowing of this gnoseological trinity. Canetti observes the sky and the red reflection and an incipient knowledge is being borne in him accompanied by stumbling. It is in the «futility of stumbling that the "I" receives the sudden illumination amidst an ungovernable movement, which he cannot control, and of which he is only a part»<sup>26</sup>. The way of knowledge leads to the observation of the outward, of the worlds of the Universe and of the reflection of human activity: it is being perceived individually, and at the moment of identification, the light of knowledge flashes out. This moment of identification also offers the ability to «get out of oneself», to cross boundaries and to assume a transcendental point of view<sup>27</sup>, which alone can provide knowledge, and which Canetti discovers in the Transformation. He is talking about the transcendental act of the «expanding of consciousness», where the ability for transformation plays a central role.

Canetti's gnoseological approach includes also the transcendental and poetic approach<sup>28</sup>. Due to the hypothetical character of our knowledge, which only the

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has been deemed to contain serious shortcomings. It creates a new image of man by attributing to him an animal, which is to say, innocent malice». Marti reads *Crowds and Power* as a return to and a delving deeper into Hobb's initial problem.

<sup>25</sup> The first sentence of *Crowds and Power* is: There is nothing that man fears more than the touch of the unknown (Canetti, 1984: 15).

<sup>26</sup> Menke, 1995: 59.

<sup>27</sup> See Angelova, 2005.

<sup>28</sup> *Transcendental* according to Immanuel Kant means «giving the possibility for knowledge». Thus, transcendental knowledge is the knowledge which raises the issue of the relationship between



transcendental and philosophical approach and the transcendental deduction make possible, the concept of reason includes the intellectual contemplation, where the object that is being thought of, can also be contemplated. This triple constellation, though, leaves enough space for connotations and for the readers' experiences, which are being enlarged while at the same time their own perceptions are made available to them. Only then can the recipient discover the other in the self and otherness in the self and include his/her own memories, cognitively enhancing his identity. In this way, the individual and social significance of this kind of transformation in the text —«Vertextung»— does not consist in memory evocation, but rather aims at using memories to enhance our constructs of reality<sup>29</sup>: a kind of a narrative about the creation of «border» values between cultures, nations, religions, the Self and the Other. Thus, Canetti builds his theory on the basis of mythological thinking in which transformation is the main player.

## 2. The Myth of Transformation

### 2.1. *Anthropologization of Transformations*

According to Canetti, the way of anthropologization —the transformation of man into man— does not pass through the animals and towards man in a causal development and illustration of Darwin's theory, but involves a feedback as well, pointing towards the animals, due to the gift and the ability for transformation which reveals the secrets of the natural and animal worlds. Canetti, who sees «transformation and play as the essence of man» (HP, 68)<sup>30</sup>, argues that man is «a being capable of transformation par excellence», thus turning transformation into an ontology concept. In this context Canetti looks for the primordial prototypical-scene which is the opposite of the «ape-turned into man through labor» theory (Marx) and of the primitive man's identification with his ancestor through libidinal envy.

This prototypical scene is to be found in the transformations chapter and is discussed throughout one fourth of the second part of the book. Canetti discovers this scene in the «pre-history,» in male fantasies about Self-Increase and Self-Consumption in the myths of the northern tribe Aranda in central Australia (CaP, 348-358), which demonstrate unexpected closeness with the fantasies during delirium tremens (CaP, 358-369). This prototypical scene demonstrated the strategy of survival where through transformation the being distances himself from his fellow men (brothers): in the first case, the sons-larvae turn freely into larvae and men, and while they are men, they eat the larvae; in the second case, the father sends his sons to hunt their half-brothers bandicoot and eats them together with his own sons. In this case, the transformation can be defined as a

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subject-object, and which can be perceived as offering the possibility for knowledge about the relationship between concept and subject. The Kantian question about knowledge conditions is a preliminary cognitive and philosophical question needed for the transcendental and philosophical point of view.

<sup>29</sup> Schmidt, 1991: 391.

<sup>30</sup> Canetti, 1986. *The human province*, hereinafter abbreviated as HP.

survival strategy. In the third legend, double cannibalism is the most apparent: the father eats his sons, and they in turn eat him from the inside. It is in this prototypical scene of demonstration of power that Canetti discovers the beginning of the anthropologization process.

The most important constituents in the myths are the mask and the figure which contain all the gnoseologic, dramatic and poetic aspects which characterize Canetti's image of the world as a *theatrum mundi* in the tradition of the Austrian theatre from Grillparzer, Nestroy, Karl Kraus to the present day where both the knowing and experiencing subjects switch roles all the time. This seems to be reminiscent of the behaviorist and psychological (ethological) studies of role behavior. Yet, while the studies of role play examine the traditional roles of mothers and fathers, of the beloved, of the teacher, the school master, etc., looking for the initial position that triggers these relationships, Canetti's initial position is in the crowd which is deeply rooted in man and which stimulates the ability for transformations in all possible directions: for example, watching a child raised among gazelles jump forty meters high, Canetti asks the question if this is not the child's idea of transformation.

The connection between transformation, figure and mask is important for both Canetti's ontological and theatrical theory. The transformation brings man out of the stiffness of the mask of his existence and through the unity of knowledge and memory directs him towards his human destiny. The figure, whose prototypes are the totemic figures, is seen by Canetti as «a fixation of specific transformations [...] figures [...] which are nothing but particular metamorphoses fixed and made permanent» (CaP, 374), encompassing the *process* of transformation linked to its result. The capacity for transformations is a quality connecting the individual with his environment and with the crowds and all historical and pre-historical periods, as well as, with the utopia about the human being and the overcoming of death. For Canetti, human existence is tied up with the idea of a «capable of transformations life»<sup>31</sup>. It is the significance of the ability for transformations for the intersubjective, intercultural and international communications that transforms it into a cultural category.

## 2.2. *Mnemonic techniques*

In his studies of crowds and power Canetti develops the cognitive mnemonic technique which, on the one hand, connects different time levels and resists historical amnesia, while on the other hand, brings together the findings of the different sciences of man. The aim and the object of this process of reminding is National Socialism, even when not stated directly, but is offered to the reader as an «empty space» to be filled with thought and additional interpretation. In this way, the reader is being involved in a more active reception than if he/she were confronted with the history of WWII or of National Socialism. By connecting disparate phenomena from different time levels and spaces, it becomes possible

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<sup>31</sup> A conversation with Joachim Schickel. In Canetti, 1972: 124f.

to go beyond history and grasp the archestruure of the problem. Canetti's mnemonic-technical approaches can be understood through his theory of pictures (images) and their significance for understanding, where by the re-cognition of a picture, man can remember the event, which in turn leads to the understanding of connections:

For one road of reality is by way of *pictures*. I don't believe there's any better road. You adhere to something that doesn't change, thus exhausting the ever changing. Pictures are nets: what appears in them is the holdable catch. Some things slip through the meshes and some go rotten. But you keep on trying, you carry the nets around with you, cast them out, and they grow stronger from their catches. However, it's important that the pictures exist *outside* a person, too; inside a human being, even they are subject to change. There has to be a place where he can find them intact, not be alone, a place where everyone who feels uncertain can find them. Whenever a man feels the precariousness of this experience, he turns to a picture. Here, experience holds still, he can look into its face<sup>32</sup>.

The technique or remembrance which is illustrated through this example passes through this tri-partite structure, beginning from the individual perception, through the perceptions of other individuals, in order to arrive at the real understanding, thus turning into a bridge for intersubjectivity and interculturality. In this example, the starting point is the specific perception which has not yet been identified by consciousness as experience, but is in a dormant condition waiting to be actualized: it is the same individual perception that is implicit in the first sentence of *Crowds and Power*:

But you don't know what you have felt: you have to see it in front of you, in others, in order to recognize it and know it. Something you recognize and know becomes *real* only if you have experienced it previously. It lies dormant in you and you can't name it; then all at once, it is there, as a painting; and something happening to others creates itself in you as a memory: now, it is real<sup>33</sup>.

It is only in the «outsidedness», in what Bakhtin calls «vnenahodimost», and in Tzvetan Todorov's «exotopy», that one can reach to the experience of something happening, and only then, the happening is being remembered and recognized as one's own. In this case, for the mnemonic technique of utmost importance is the connection: how through the externalized («vnenahodimij») object, through an effect of alienation, the yet unidentified personal experience is being experienced and made sense of, in order to become universal human experience. The acceptance of the exotopic picture and the remembering, in the sense of the acceptance of the unconsciously available, overlap and are transformed into a personal experience. Two more tendencies which bear directly on Canetti's mnemonics technique and his *intercultural poly-historical remembrance* should be discussed: the Jewish tradition and the early New Age.

In the poly-historical structure of memory, as in the case with the concept of history, we can observe the privileging of time concepts (such as transience and historicism) at the expense of the cognitive reminding whose aim is to overcome

<sup>32</sup> Canetti, 1983: 113.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibidem*: 118.

death. In this way, the remembered acquires the function of «resisting transience in the name of eternity». Jacob Taubes notes that «memory in the Judaic tradition is considered a positive principle that stands in opposition to forgetfulness as a negative principle. Memory, though, is masculine, while forgetfulness is feminine: Sikaron, memory, associates with sakar = male, while a nakab, -to sift, associates with nkeba = female»<sup>34</sup>.

The strategy of forgetfulness in Canetti also stands for the female principle, while remembrance stands for the male principle. Canetti attributes one specific meaning to remembering in the semantics of patriarchy: writing is attributed to the male principle, language —to the female—. Undoubtedly, the issue here is the mnemonic-technical policy which constructs gender difference, pointing both to Otto Weininger and to the Judaic traditions of Deuteronomy as a literary work which represents a «codification of remembering guided by guilt» —guilt because of forgetting of the old sacred commandments and the covenant with the father God—. In this case, the Jewish diaspora catastrophe is interpreted «not as a reason for, but a consequence of forgetfulness», «the constant history of betrayal, of deviation and of fall into paganism»<sup>35</sup>. This guilt can only be absolved through a collective memory and remembrance: God's pronouncements are usually rendered in second person, plural.

Canetti's commemoration techniques rely both on the west European tradition of individual mnemonics technique (dating back to Cicero's history of Simónides), and the collective cultural mnemonics technique of Jewish diaspora —a collective consciousness of guilt, caused by forgetfulness. In his works, Canetti brings together these two seemingly contradictory mnemonics— the individual and the collective. Individual memory and individual responsibility cannot redeem or reclaim the guilty present: it is only a collective remembering, raising mankind's own responsibility to mankind that can accomplish this.

Different contemporary mnemonic techniques like national (nationalistic) or social (from class to race struggle) build commemorative memorials of heroes and reproduce history in the form of «heaps»<sup>36</sup>, of murders and horrors. At the same time this mnemonics technique serves to connect two different cultures in the context of European civilization: the Roman, as the platform for individualism, and the Jewish one, as a collective thinking of a human diaspora burdened by guilt.

### **2.3. *The Patriarchal character of the narrative perspective***

The story is being told by a narrator who tries to preserve the collective memory of mankind through transformations into pictures and «citations» from historical and pre-historical experience. The concept of a «collective memory» is generated through the bringing together of disparate narrative points of view, ex-

<sup>34</sup> Cited according to Assmann, 1991: 23.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibidem*: 337f.

<sup>36</sup> The heap is one of Canetti's symbols of power.

amined intentionally through the prism of the two human instincts—for crowds and for power—which model human history. The narrative perspective handles the time and space of history, as well as the present, and transforms the temporal and spatial dimension of the universal human experience into a permanently present space of the experience of crowds and power: from the supposed beginnings on the trees, when the consciousness of the creative ability of the human hand was raised, to the 20<sup>th</sup> c. paranoiacs, from the Aranda people, the bushmen, and the Chukchi, to the believers in different contemporary religions, it accumulates the remembrances of the different cultures in order to transmit through their sum total its own message and insight about the engines of human history. Canetti's approach is transcendental, connecting all sciences about men. The ancient cultures and the citations from them are only the «pictures» that remind humankind of its own experience: they are different voices in a universal human drama which he stages in a unique way.

Fluctuating interaction of narrative perspectives represent human history as a memory in a dramatic form. Viewed from such an angle, the citations in *Crowds and Power* do not function as evidence, but illustrate evidence and knit the «network» by using different pictures, in the sense discussed above, in which experience is contained and transformed into an insight. Interestingly, Canetti traces this experience using primarily «male» points of view, which turns his perspective—*Erzählperspektive*—into *Er-zähl* perspective (counting male points of view). The narrator lets these perspectives speak for themselves without interfering, simply tracing the transformations of the central phenomenon—crowds and power—, yet it is not being experienced in its entirety, since it relates only to the male «I». This narrative perspective, which fluctuates across history and geography, claims to reconcile mythic thinking with scientific experience, to preserve collective memory both as knowledge and as a science of man, and to defend the human from death. Yet, both in his observations of the invisible crowds of sperm and in male fantasies about self-reproduction, he excludes the female principle. There are only three examples in his Opus Magnum which serve as a summation of the female experience: the image of the witch, the power of the mother and the raped goddess<sup>37</sup>.

In the same way in which the sperm represents the ideal image of the invisible crowd, the mother stands for extreme power. The father is to be understood as the life creating principle, bearing the hereditary crowd (information), in the form of a genetic memory while the mother is the institutionally fossilized family power. Therefore, it is fair to say that memories in Elias Canetti's mnemonics model in *Crowds and Power* are of masculine nature. This is a new kind of a model that aims at summarizing the universal human experience in snapshots yet, as an old Chinese saying and the title of a book about the disempowerment of women in myth and reality state, it excludes the «other half of heaven»<sup>38</sup>. This

<sup>37</sup> There is yet a forth description of women as a part in «double crowds» (Canetti, 1984: 64f), in Jean de Léry, 1557 in Brazil, which is only seen as a reaction to male action and not as a memory of human experience.

<sup>38</sup> Toman, 1987.

patriarchal narrative that can 'transform' itself into its cultural and social experience, knows only half of humankind, yet claims to stand for the whole of human experience.

This perspective reveals yet another aspect: by using «mimetic presentation of sources», this catallactic narrative highlights the predominance of mimesis. The network of images stimulates transformations both initiated by and striving for mimesis which results in antinomy and aporia of mimesis. In this book we find perspectives which are NOT clarified or offered to the recipient as «empty spaces» to be filled in, in the meaning Wolfgang Iser attributes to them. What the book is silent about is also the result of centuries long exercise of power, and it takes a long time to set the oppressed free of the clutches of power.

### 3. The Myth of Transformation

#### 3.1. *World theatre as a gnoseological theatre of power*

Through this narrative technique the world events are also staged by the narrator as a world theatre. The connection between world events and world theatre is effected by the dramatic-anthropological character of the theory of transformations. The theatre metaphor plays an enormous role in the historical, political, historical-philosophical and state theories and can be traced within the framework of European civilization since antiquity. What Canetti undertakes with the concepts of transformation, mask, and figure cannot be explained as a metaphor. He anthropologizes the theatrical and «dramatizes» the anthropological concept. The concepts of his drama theory are at the same time concepts of his anthropology —transformation, mask, figure— and in this way both theories condition and supplement each other or transition into one another. The author treats transformation not only as a main anthropological category, transforming man into a human being, but as a main dramatic category as well, thus distancing himself from and opposing Brecht's theater of alienation.

Canetti argues that the figure is a proof of the human ability for transformation: it represents both a process and something new —the product of this process— (CaP, 373). The Mask is an «acoustic mask», a unique and singular way of speaking that characterizes people. According to Canetti, the drama is kept alive «by language», we may as well say, if it were not a bit ambivalent, «by languages». The human drama which Canetti represents in *Crowds and Power* does *feed on languages*: the semantics is the same in different cultures: it is semi-otics, language, and clothing that are different and create tension which on five hundred pages aims at revealing the roots of an evil whose name is almost never mentioned.

Another important concept in Canetti's theory of drama, which plays a significant role in his theory of anthropology, is the idea of the Reversal which he sets against Aristotle's peripeteia and through which he opposes any ideas for possible developments, understanding, or dialectics of development. According to Canetti «in principle, the drama takes place outside time», in the same way

in which in *Crowd and Power*, the drama of mankind takes place outside of history: in this case history is only an intermezzo. The reversal is realized through «change or leap of masks»<sup>39</sup> which opens the possibility for a perception and acceptance of events and people, for «an assimilation» aiming at an understanding of their masks. As is the case with mnemonic techniques and transformation, in drama the mask also plays the most important part in Canetti's theory. The leap of masks has a cognitive character because the understanding of otherness is carried out through it—an understanding which excludes psychological attempts for reincarnation and is not carried out by invading otherness, but takes the opposite direction by receiving otherness within the self—. For Canetti, it is not only the World theatre as a macro structure, but also the distinct historical events and happenings contained in it as micro structures that are represented as dramas. For example, «The Escape of Joseph» in the chapter «The Survivor» is represented as a human drama in three acts.

It is only after the taking up of «voices» within the self, after their assimilation, and after the author has invited the reader to engage with transformations towards a leap in these mask that the narrator initiates yet another process of distancing through evaluation and conclusions about the double figure of the totem and the ability of the figure for transformation in the totem. This is to be understood as the usual way of indication, pointing from the individual to the general, yet this way is described in dramatic terms and with the tools of drama, so as to be able to lead to understanding with the help of transformations. The examples are not just numbered, as it is done in scientific studies, but are mimetically converted into voices and masks.

Canetti's transformation concepts make it clear that through the variety of leaps in different «cultural masks,» he includes also the assimilation of the otherness of different cultures, as well as their variability. In his analysis of the paranoia of the mayor of Dresden, Schreber, Canetti discounts the image of the fossilized despot in favor of the playful *trickster*, *the one who is in a constant state of transformation*. The suggested variety of possibilities for transformations casts Canetti himself as one in a constant state of transformation: through the open reception structure of *Crowds and Power* he distances himself both from the fossilization of the system and the need for causality and motivation. The author strives to get out of the paranoiac tendency for «complete seizing of the world through words, as though language were a fist and the world lay in it» (CaP, 425), by looking for connections between man and otherness outside linguistic and thought articulation, and in the arrangement and interaction between the diverse spheres of the individual, the social and the universal, in the incessant flux of transformations. It is in this myth of transformations that Canetti hopes to uncover the social mystery of life.

<sup>39</sup> In the English translation of *Crowds and Power*, the concept *Maskensprung* has not been rendered as a specific concept: on p. 284, in the chapter, *Power and Speed*, it is described as *substitution of one mask*, whereas further down on the same page as a *change of masks*. On p. 374, in the chapter *The Figure and the Mask*, it is rendered as *a leap*.

### 3.2. *The historical theatre of power and the deconstruction of the concept of nation*

In his notes, as well as in *Crowds and Power*, Canetti distances himself from historicism and historicity. His unique thinking process aims at a complete encompassing of the problems in the interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary approach, a way of thinking which does not start from the development but from being. In spite of the fact that in his works Canetti displays an extremely strict approach to history, for him, it is just material used to draw the parameters for his insights which reach beyond history. He takes from history only the *pictures (images)*, the historical examples, and then uses them as starting points for his *cognitive mnemonics technique*. In *Crowds and Power* he uses history as quotation, as an illustration of ideas: Hitler and the so called Versailles diktat, inflation and the German-French «hereditary hostility»: parliamentarianism and the two party system are seen as a transference of militant crowds into the parliamentary struggles, the socialist and capitalist forms of production—as universal religions, which according to Canetti are contemporary manifestations of *increase pack*. These historical «quotations» also demonstrate his deep knowledge of history—. In addition, Canetti references authentic historical biographical and autobiographical documents, such as, Schreber's notes, Kafka's or Dr. Hachiyas' diaries, Speer's memories of Hitler, etc.<sup>40</sup>.

Canetti's reading of these documents demonstrates the permanency of historical experience and this prompts him to develop a negative idea about the permanency as a historical model for interpretation. Theories about history rely on linear progress<sup>41</sup>, as the grace of later birth, or the decadent model<sup>42</sup>, in the sense of the grace of earlier birth, or the cyclic model as an explanation of historical processes. Canetti leaves the vicious cycle of these historical interpretations which also contain futuristic perspectives defining, respectively, the eschatological, cyclic or theological model, and in agreement with their ideology, strive to anticipate and appropriate the future<sup>43</sup>. His historical model is the model of permanency of the two human instincts throughout different historical, social, psy-

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<sup>40</sup> Although his essays, *Hitler, according to Speer* and *Dr. Hachiya's Diary of Hiroshima*, are not included in his theoretical work, they can be viewed as case studies and historical illustrations of his studies of crowds and power.

<sup>41</sup> The conflicts between generations date back to antiquity, where the New and the Old are in opposition and competition. These conflicts had determined the narrative of history and of the philosophy of history. Whatever the constellation of concepts, authors such as Ovid or Horace, Marx or Popper, they all recognize the grace of their later birth—to have the tradition of earlier generations available to them, to which they could continue to contribute, and which they can use and critique from the point of view of the new information available during their life time: and they were happy to live in their own age—.

<sup>42</sup> The decadent structure is present both in the cyclic interpretation models of the world, for example Spengler's *The Decline of the West*, and in the Bible, as a linear concept of the fall of man, through the Anti-Christ and to Judgement Day.

<sup>43</sup> In this case, examples can be found in seemingly opposing theories: Herder's historical and philosophical cyclic theory about the age of cultures which includes the concepts of progress and decadence in the development of cultures, and Nietzsche's theory about the formative cultural role of the Apollonian and Dionysian principles which excludes the idea of any development.



chological and individual manifestations which cannot be arraigned in a timely procession.

In *Crowds and Power* Canetti abandons the comprehensive historicity of universal history in order to find the forces which govern history and to seek answers to universal human questions, delineated against the background of historical and geographical fixity, the uniqueness and singularity of every individual events. There is not a single historical event that cannot be explained with the historical causality and the culture of a given people and thus rendered «innocuous» and non-threatening. It becomes threatening and current only when we identify it in ourselves as a possibility, when we realize our own vulnerability, and when we realize how vulnerable humankind is to such kind of ideologies.

Is this only the Germans or the Jew who have reneged throughout history? Were they the only ones to have believed that they were God's chosen people? And what happens when evil befalls another nation? The historical explanation of causes and effects of a given people is not enough: it only hides the larger part of the whole truth that history preserves these events in the cultural and social memory and every war is fought to revenge previous wars, thus reproducing and multiplying war and hatred. In this way, history becomes a «fixated vendetta of the masses», of *all* masses, and that is exactly what condemns history (HP, 5). In his introductory lecture at the University of Jena, Friedrich Schiller raised the question: *why and with what purpose do we study universal history?* and talked about the need to study history as a universal human need. Since the last two centuries have demonstrated how history is used as an alibi, we should again seek the way to humanity outside of history, so as not to drown and perish in the victorious pathos of different histories and hysterics. And since we cannot leave the original fall entirely to time and history, our alternative is to live in history, as if it is not history, and to look instead for the crossing point of the perspectives between transience and eternity where life has its highest value. It is in this context that Canetti examines also the signifying symbols of nations in folklore which unite and consolidate around themselves enormous human masses:

The greatest intellectual temptation in my life, the only one I have to fight very hard against is: to be a total Jew (HP, 51).

Canetti writes at the beginning of 1944.

The specifics of Canetti's universal human perspective derive from his own biography. He does not choose between inner and outer perspective, but writes from two perspectives, as a Jew and as «a German-language writer»<sup>44</sup>, and in this way takes up the kind of responsibility which is not bound by national, ethnic, or political groupings. This means to be a Jew, yet also to belong to everybody who shares the universal human values. The responsibility to mankind, which he defines as the writer's vocation in his essay, «The Writer's Profession», is ac-

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<sup>44</sup> «I did not need anybody to tell me —least of all Hitler— in what language to write. My ancestors had to leave Spain in 1492 and took Spanish with them to Turkey where they settled. They had kept this Spanish pure in their new country for more than four hundred years, and it was my mother language. I began studying German at the age of eight».

cepted as his own responsibility in a broader sense —as a thinker and as an intellectua—.

Most of the confusion in the studies of *Crowds and Power* is created by Canetti's symbols of nations. Attempts to contest Canetti's observations by resorting to historical and geographical descriptions of the logic of historical progress are not infrequent even today. What is not taken into consideration, however, is the fact that we are not dealing here with teleological and soteriological historical descriptions, but with the deconstruction and reconstruction of images aiming at enhancing our cognition. These images are being constantly produced and reproduced in every single individual: therefore, on a basic level we are talking about a literal reproduction (citation of fictions) which ties the individual to his/her crowd. Canetti refuses to look for a definition of nation:

Most attempts to find out what nations really have suffered from are an intrinsic defect: they have been attempts to define the general concept of nationality. People have said that a nation is this or that, apparently believing that all that mattered was to find the right definition; once found, this would be applicable to all nations equally (CaP, 169).

Coupled with this «seemingly objective approach» is a «more naive one» (CaP, 169), yet Canetti does not use this «more naive approach» for a definition of nation by looking for a common language, territory, history, religion and other fictions created by the theoreticians of nationalism; he is not looking for a seemingly “objective” history of a given nation in order to prove her greatness and national consolidation. He discovers common denominators among nations only in the «peculiar mixture of moral and feral pretensions» (CaP, 169) and in the existence of national crowd symbols which bestow upon its members the sense of belonging and common destiny, so «that no member of a nation ever sees himself as alone» (CaP, 170). In this way, at the very beginning of the chapter, *The Crowds In History*, Canetti poses the question of the imaginary which, in varying degrees, is the basis of all concepts about what a nation is in all members of a given nation and is transmitted orally or in a written form through folk tales, folk songs and legends as a symbol/marker for belonging to a specific crowd. It is in these concepts that he looks for «National Crowd Symbols». He gives the definition of the 'crowd symbol' already at the end of the first part of the book, *The Crowd*:

Crowd Symbols is the name I give to collective units which do not consist of men, but which are still felt to be crowds. Corn and forest, rain, wind, sand, fire and the sea are such units. Every one of these phenomena comprehends some of essential attributes of the crowd. Although they do not consist of men, each of them recalls the crowd and stands as a symbol for it in myth, dream, speech and song (CaP, 75).

Except for wheat, which is a product of human activity —sowing— all symbols named here belong to the wider context of natural phenomena: forest, rain, wind, sand, fire and sea are parts of the crowd of the universe, and it is these that form a wider framework within which human life is situated, and it is this crowd of nature on earth whose laws hold true for the human crowd as well. It is the same framework within which Canetti positions his own cognitive and initiatory

experience on Alserstrasse in his autobiography *The Torch in My Ear* and which is used as the basis for his Knowledge theory. Interestingly enough, he does not mention the sky here with its «multiplicity of stars» which typically have carried symbolic meanings in myth, dream, speech and song, from Plato's philosophical observations (Tales – Anecdote, the dialogue Theaetetus), to Kant, and up to Canetti's own Illumination<sup>45</sup> experience, which he lives as a genuinely «Enlightenment experience». In this way, by placing man within the universal context, Canetti not only builds a bridge connecting us with nature and the universe, as is evident in his autobiography, but this connection goes beyond its cognitive character to acquire an existential and historical nature and an «anthropomorphic quality»<sup>46</sup> —a sense of cosiness/Geborgenheit and a kind of self-reflection of the human crowd in nature crowd, of security and self-discovery, of Self in nature—. It is this double function that is typical of Canetti's crowd symbols:

Behind every recognized crowd symbol one can find the concrete crowd which nourishes it: nor need one depend here on guesswork alone (CaP, 79).

Thus, Canetti's national crowd symbols serve as a pathway to and knowledge of the images nations create about themselves and the others. This use of «crowd symbols as instruments of knowledge», as Petra Kuhnau<sup>47</sup> aptly puts it, does not serve to provide a definition of nation, but to provide a way of knowing of those constructed «Images». What is at stake here is exactly the Difference between the order of things, of nations, and the order of Images. On the other hand, these symbols afford a glimpse at those critical aspects in all nations that make them susceptible to manipulation from all possible sources —by those in power, by politicians, by media, whenever they need to be used for populist goals or to be mobilized for war—:

Every member of a nation always sees himself, or his picture of himself, in a fixed relationship to the particular symbol which has become the most important for his nation. In its periodic reappearance when a moment demands it lies the continuity of national feeling (CaP, 170f).

Thus, the symbol functions as a bridge, a kind of a transitioning towards the *scope of existence* and is a «visible sign of an invisible reality» that makes it possible to understand the nature of the pictures and the images while at the same time represents this invisibility and inscrutability<sup>48</sup>; it recurs as a signifier to the signified while at the same time leaving room for the coded information where meanings evolve, which, «even when articulated in all languages, still remain unproven and vague»<sup>49</sup>. We need to bear in mind that here the signifier is of a second order- we are not talking about reality, but only about images which find their expression both in art and in everyday live, in people's «faith», so to say. In

<sup>45</sup> Canetti, 1983: 123.

<sup>46</sup> Kuhnau, 1995: 98.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibidem*: 104.

<sup>48</sup> Wörterbuch der Symbolik, 1979: 552f.

<sup>49</sup> See Goethe, 1907: Nr. 749: «Die Symbolik verwandelt die Erscheinung in Idee, die Idee in ein Bild, und so, daß die Idee im Bild immer unendlich wirksam und unerreichbar bleibt und, selbst in allen Sprachen ausgesprochen, doch unaussprechlich bliebe».

this way, the belonging to a nationality, in fact, means belonging to images and fictions:

What they are fighting *for* is proclaimed often enough, but what they fight *as* is unknown. It is true they have a name for it; they say they fight as Frenchmen or as Germans, English or Japanese. But what meaning is attached to any of these words by the person using it of himself? (CaP, 169f).

It is not by chance that in the original text Canetti uses the word «glauben»: *Worin glaubt er anders zu sein —that which he thinks makes him different—*, while at the same time *that which he believes makes him different*. In German, *Glauben* has two meanings: 1. think, hold the opinion, (which in everyday talk refers to the sphere of customs, inherited prejudices and oral traditions)<sup>50</sup> and 2. to believe. In this case, both meanings of the word are active which is obvious in Canetti's conclusion that nations tend to be used as a substitute for religions acquiring a new dimension of religious faith:

Thus nations are regarded here as though they were religions; and they do in fact tend to turn into something resembling religions from time to time (CaP, 170).

In different ages and cultures, this personal union between nationalism and religion has found different forms of expression. Canetti is not interested in the description of those forms of expression, but only in pointing to the existence of this union. This fact makes Canetti a forerunner of the contemporary studies of nationalism which do not examine nationalism in the singular, but look for its multiple manifestations and their religious nature. The propaganda of nationalism always contains a religious element and serves as a substitute for religion.

The most recent manifestation of nationalism is the union between the state and the nation where usually nation is to be understood as an ethnically pure entity. When this union is complemented by religion in its pure form, we encounter the greatest contemporary danger: the Islamic state, the Jewish state, the Christian state. In each case, the adjective in front of «state» can also define the kind of terror practiced on other ethnicities. The trinity ethno(nationalism), state, and religion determines the teleological and soteriological character of faith, whereas the specificity of each individual nationalism is predicated upon particular cultural and historical conditions. What these national ideologies and respectively religions have in common is «their importunate appetite and the claims they make that they are alike» [...] «they want aggrandisement, and substantiate their claim with the fact of their increase» (CaP, 169). The sense of belonging to the crowd, and respectively to a *crowd symbol*, with whom the separate individuals in the nation identify with is always different. We should differentiate between the crowd symbol and the collective symbol<sup>51</sup>: collective symbols are the ones that function in the collective consciousness as symbols for specific denotations and as «instruments for the re-integration of a society that has been divided along the lines of types of labor connected with different spheres of practice, knowledge

<sup>50</sup> At the time when Canetti writes *Crowds and Power*, the studies of everyday life and social history take their first steps.

<sup>51</sup> Link, Gerhard, 1991.

and discourse»<sup>52</sup>, «their collective meaning is derived from their social and historical significance»<sup>53</sup>. The collective symbol is tied to the supporting group of symbols —the respective collective entity which carries and produces them—. Unlike the collective symbol, the crowd symbol determines the semantics, the contents of the symbol and what is being defined: «Collective units which do not consist of men, but which are still felt to be crowds» (CaP, 75) and which appear «in myth, dream, speech and song» (CaP, 75). These crowd symbols are being experienced collectively both by the distinct individuals and by the whole nation. Canetti does not come up with a historical «definition» and explanation of crowd symbols which can explain «everything» and does not seek explanation in the seemingly «objective» history in order to explain its greatness or national consolidation. He finds the connections between different nations in «a peculiar mixture of moral and feral pretensions» (CaP, 169) and in the existence of crowd symbols, so «that no member of a nation ever sees himself as alone» (CaP, 170). Thus, Canetti contends that the national crowd symbols are fictions of the imagination<sup>54</sup>, represented both by the oral and written traditions:

One must take the trouble to find out what is peculiar in each nation; and do it without being infected by its greed. One must stand apart, a devotee of none, but profoundly and honestly interested in all of them. One should allow each to unfold in one's mind as though one were condemned actually to belong to it for a good part of the lifetime. But one must never surrender entirely to one at the cost of all the others (CaP, 169).

This is an invitation to a citizenship of the world/*Weltbürgertum* par excellence! At the same time, it is also an invitation to Transformation, not in order to remain in it, but rather to attain knowledge through it. Canetti expects and insists upon transformation to be used as a cognitive modus of the historical and political processes. Yet, we must not forget that, according to him, only a part of knowledge can be attained through the mask of transformation. The remaining, equally important part of knowledge is being attained «outside» and «on the side», and independent of either side in the comparative observation of Unmasking. This type of observation with the attendant reduction and exaggeration can be defined as a «parallactic type of representation»<sup>55</sup> looking at every nation through the crack of its self-observation only to observe the object («*allassein*») from all sides and in its movement between different objects but always «on the side» (*para*), and then in a transformed form changes places as it leaves enough receptive space for the reader to move in. There is yet another peculiarity in this parallactic approach for observation: the tools it uses for the observation of mass and individual psychological phenomena are derived from the natural sciences

<sup>52</sup> Link, 1983: 60.

<sup>53</sup> Link, Gerhard, 1991: 18.

<sup>54</sup> It is worth noting here that the scientific description of nations as imaginary begins much later: see Anderson, 1983.

<sup>55</sup> Parallaxe —the angle between two rays which is formed when a given point is looked at on a straight line from two different points of view—. From Greek *parallaxis* «exchange, a movement to and fro», to *paralassieren* go off, to differ, from *para* «by, on the side» to *allassein* «change, transform, exchange», to *allos* «different», therefore, «to make different» (Herkunftswörterbuch. Orbis Verlag München, 1993).

and presented in a narrative. More light is shed on this parallaxic narration by Georg Christoph Lichtenberg's observations, an author highly respected by Canetti and an example for emulation: they both favor the aphoristic way of writing, as well as the transdiscursive *leaps* between literature and the natural sciences.

*Parallaxe, davon ein Exempel an unserem eigenen Leib, man halte des Abends bei sternhellem Himmel sein Gesicht so sehr in die Höhe, daß es beinah horizontal zu liegen kommt, schließe das eine Auge zu und sehe was für Sterne die Spitze der Nase berührt, alsdann schließe man das andere und betrachte nun, was für Sterne die Nase, durch das zuerst geschlossene Auge gesehen, bedeckt, der Boden des größten Zirkels zwischen den beiden Sternen ist die Parallaxe der Nasen-Spitze, trägt bei kurzen Nasen nicht leicht über 90° und bei großen niemals unter 40°<sup>56</sup>.*

During the observation of a preferred constellation from a personal point of view, a concept from physics and astronomy is being applied by the philosophers. Yet in this case the «tip of one's nose» serves as the personal point of view. This comparison sounds like a parodic periphrasis of the famous Kantian «Enlightenment experience» during the observation of the sky (related to the stumbling), which most certainly has the same meaning for Canetti, as we have already seen at the beginning of this study. When representing national images in the form of crowd symbols, Canetti draws his «mimetic presentation of sources» to its limits whose horizon does not extend beyond «the tip of the nose» of the nation in question; however, the order of presentation of the texts, carefully selected by the narrator, helps the recipient identify the author's point of view.

This reductionist way of observation can be found as a narrative perspective already in *Auto-da-Fe*, in the «Gucklochperspektive»- point of view through the key hole which the narrator bestows upon his protagonist, the sinologist, Peter Kien, who, in his turn, develops «scientific tools» for the «management or reality» through an observation of pants involving the ostracizing of all types of skirts<sup>57</sup>. In my view, here we do not encounter a traditional deconstruction of the author's position or the author's disappearance behind the text in the Foucauldian sense, as Henninghaus thinks<sup>58</sup>. The author is present sporadically in the text not only in the selection of texts, images and citations and their specific arrangement, but also explicitly, in the relatively short notes, for instance, about the «happiness» of the Italians for not having obtained a false national symbol. Thus, the parallaxic way of presentation can be seen as a specific type of interdiscursive form of communication and cognition which stands in opposition to the paradigms of the monological scientific discourse that uses inductive and deductive methodology. In conclusion, we can concur that Canetti views nationalisms as a problem of crowd psychology, studying them from the point of view of the crowds and of the power that manipulates them. Every kind of nationalism can be analyzed from these two perspectives combined with the power of mass media which mediates

<sup>56</sup> Lichtenberg, 1983: 19.

<sup>57</sup> See Angelova, 2005.

<sup>58</sup> Henninghaus, 1984: 116-122.

between the crowds and the power, thus becoming a specific institution of power in itself. Every nationalism is a subject to this triple dissection in which history, as we have already seen, plays the role of a connection between myth and glue, intermezzo and explanation, an alibi, and draws the framework of all crimes, but by no means offers resolution of conflicts. History in such cases serves as an alibi, as a fixed vendetta of the masses (HP, 5)<sup>59</sup> and in turn, explains and condones the crimes of a given crowd in the present with fictional or real crimes committed by other nations in the past.

*Alle können Mörder werden, auch die, an denen gemordet wurde, diese noch mehr, und gegen diese Blutrache der Massen, die Geschichte heißt, gibt es ein einziges Mittel: die Ächtung des Todes.*

(Notes from Hampstead, 1982)<sup>60</sup>

Canetti stands at the beginning of the cultural reversal which through the dimension of auto-reflexivity and the new definition of the ratio between subject and object in knowledge constructs the connection between analysis of society and of culture. In opposition to all crowd theories, positioning the crowd in opposition to the individual, Canetti sees the understanding of the crowd within the individual as of primary importance, that is to say, the understanding of his *instinct* for the crowd. Around this proximity between the concept of crowds in the natural sciences and in the humanitarian understanding of the concept of the crowd and the attendant concept of power, the whole of *Canetti's anthropological, cognitive and aesthetic theory of transformation and the opposite process of unmasking* has been constructed (CaP, 378; HP, 197). The two sided process of transformation has yet to be understood through the absorption, respectively assimilation of the alien identity, and the consequent exit from this role through a leap and a return to the initial position, but not to the initial identity.

Since in the process of *Verwandlung* (transformation) and *Entwandlung* (unmasking) an enrichment of identity has taken place, the consecutive transformation will have a new starting point. This concept brings together psychology and sociology, drama and narration, gnoseology and mnemonic techniques. The significance of the ability for transformations for the intersubjective, intercultural and international communication turns the concept of transformation into a cultural category and a key concept for understanding the structural changes of publicity in the digital age.

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<sup>59</sup> It is indicative that Canetti mentions this vendetta in his notes: in 1942, in the heat of the war, in the *Human Province* and in 1982 in *Notes from Hampstead*.

<sup>60</sup> Canetti, 2005: 334.

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